



Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Montana

Introduction and General Description

The Kootenai River Watershed is an international watershed encompassing approximately 18,000 square miles of British Columbia and Alberta Canada, 7,500 square miles in northwest Montana, and a small portion in northern Idaho. The Kootenai River originates in British Columbia's Kootenay National Park. It flows 485 miles through steep canyon terrain and agricultural flat land in Montana and Idaho, and eventually returns to Canada and Kootenay Lake.

The Upper Kootenai Drainage, upstream of Libby Dam and extending into British Columbia, is a focus area for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Kootenai National Forest covers 76 percent of the Upper Kootenai, Burlington Northern and Plum Creek Timber Company own

14 percent, with the remaining 10 percent in private ownership. About 90 percent of the Upper Kootenai watershed consists of native coniferous forest, and 10 percent of the basin is agricultural land used primarily for pasture and forage production.

The Kootenai River and Lake Koocanusa contain important populations of native bull trout that migrate over the international border between Canada and Montana. The Upper Kootenai River is recognized as the most important of the 12 restoration/conservation areas for bull trout in Montana requiring restoration planning efforts under the Federal recovery program for the threatened bull trout.



Bull trout.

Species of Special Concern

The Tobacco River Watershed, a primary tributary to the Kootenai River, provides some of the most important spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the lower 48 States. Grave Creek, a tributary to the Tobacco River, has been identified as the most important spawning tributary in the United States portion of the Upper Kootenai. The Kootenai River watershed also supports populations of redband rainbow trout, kokanee salmon, and white sturgeon. Other wildlife Species of Special Concern include: grizzly bear, gray wolf, Canada lynx, wolverine, fisher, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, and over 190 species of migratory birds.

Threats

Over 90 percent of the Tobacco River Watershed and most of the lower portion of Grave Creek are privately owned. Presently, land development is clustered; however,



rapid population influx is resulting in increased residential development and recreational subdivision. Associated activities such as recreation, timber harvest, improper grazing practices, fish passage barriers, de-watered streams, and artificial pond construction increase the threat to native salmonids (salmon and trout).



Conservation Strategies

In 1998, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program began working in the Upper Kootenai River Watershed. We designated the Tobacco River Valley as a Partners for Fish and Wildlife Core Area. Other organizations and agencies were also collaborating on natural resource problems in the watershed. Many of these organizations were linked together through their membership in the Kootenai River Network. In 1999, Partners for Fish and Wildlife further acknowledged the value of the Network by entering into a formal cooperative agreement. This cooperative approach has led to improved resource management practices and the restoration of aquatic resources and improved water quality within the watershed. The Grave Creek watershed restoration project is a good example of this collaborative effort. A log-crib dam was built in Grave Creek in 1993 to provide irrigation water for the Glen Lake Irrigation District and drinking water for the town of Eureka.

The dam is a major barrier to upstream migrating bull trout. The Partners Program, in cooperation with the Glen Lake Irrigation

District, Forest Service, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, worked out an agreement to remove the log dam and replace it with a series of rock weir structures. The new rock weirs will improve fish passage, transport bedload, and divert water for irrigation. In addition, a self-cleaning fish screen was installed to prevent downstream migrating fish from entering the ditch system. This project has inspired several landowners to form a group called Friends of Grave Creek. The Friends of Grave Creek want to restore the lower reach of Grave Creek to a naturally functioning stream and improve habitat for native fish.

Additional Partners Program projects planned for the Upper Kootenai include: stream restoration, improved grazing management strategies and riparian habitat restoration projects.

The costs for habitat restoration in this Focus Area are:

Wetland Restoration - \$650/acre
 Upland Enhancement - \$10/acre
 In-stream Restoration -
 \$9.50 /linear foot

Riparian Restoration -
 \$1.50/linear foot

Partners

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Bullitt Foundation
 City of Kimberley, British Columbia
 Flathead Land Trust
 Friends of Grave Creek
 Idaho Fish and Game Department
 Lincoln County Conservation District
 Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, B.C.
 Montana Department of Environmental Quality
 Montana Land Reliance
 Natural Resources Conservation Service
 Northwest Power Planning Council
 U.S. Forest Service
 Big Meadows Grazing Association
 Cinnabar Foundation
 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife
 Flathead Chapter of Trout Unlimited
 Glen Lake Irrigation District
 Kootenai River Network
 Lincoln County Road Department
 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Montana Department of Natural Resource
Conservation
The Nature Conservancy
Bonneville Power Administration
Plum Creek Timber Company



Friends of Grave Creek.

Accomplishments

- Restored 3.6 miles of stream and riparian habitat at 6 sites.
- Restored 14 miles of stream for fish passage.

Future Needs

- Restore 4,000 acres of wetlands on private lands within this Focus Area.
- Enhance or restore 100,000 acres of grasslands.
- Restore 350 miles of in-stream and/or riparian habitat.

Kootenai River Watershed (750,000 acres)

